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The American people not only witnessed but were the participants in a national revolution this past winter.

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They didn't realize it.

But it happened.

The media called it the protest of the striking farmers.

But it was much more than that. It was much more than a bunch of goats running loose on Capitol Hill -- tractors in the streets -- and farmers demanding 100 percent of parity.

It was easy for a lot of people to dismiss the whole affair as a "media-inspired event."

But the media alone -- with all the headlines and all the networks covering it for months -- could not have generated such national attention had there not been an undercurrent of national interest and concern already existing among the people.

And so the people watched -- they noted the stories -- they took sides -- and thus they came to be participants in the whole movement.

This phenomenon has never happened before. Yet, farmers by the hundreds have come to Washington down through the years pleading their cause.

Remarks prepared for delivery by Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland, before the Commodity Club, Washington, D.C., Thursday, April 20, 1978.

From the days of Henry Wallace in the 30's, down through Charlie Brannan, Ezra Taft Benson and Earl Butz, Secretaries of Agriculture have had to face protesting farmers.

But who ever remembers those times?

The media all but ignored them completely.

The farmers came. They went home. And nobody knew the difference or cared.

But this time there was a difference. People saw the farmers. People listened. Congress took some action. I personally met with thousands of farmers in Washington and some 30 states from January to April.

Why all this attention to a relatively few farmers out of some 2 million producers in the country?

The answer is as simple as it is complex.

The answer is FOOD -- the price of it -- the availability of it.

The striking farmers pinpointed to the nation a revolution of change that has been going on in agriculture for the past twenty years but has gone largely unnoticed by most people.

The agricultural protest focused, dramatically, the underlying new concern and new awareness of people about the role of the farmer and the importance of food.

Never again, will farm programs be enacted in a legislative vacuum or beyond the periphery of public attention.

And that is good.

For if and when more people begin to understand all the myriad and complex problems attendant with the production, the availability and the cost of food, then people will also start understanding -- or at least realize the importance -- some of the other basic issues that directly affect their lives. Issues like energy -- inflation -- exports and the balance of payments because you cannot ignore these problems if you are concerned about food.

Twenty -- ten -- or even five years ago, it would have been unthinkable to discuss these issues in the context of the farm problem.

But today, they're inescapable.

And that's what this whole revolution is all about.

And I think it's worth examining a little closer.

The time was -- not too long ago -- when the so-called farm problem was an isolated provincial problem. It was never considered or acted upon within the mainstream of national economics or politics. "Farm politics" was a game played somewhere out in the vague boondocks of what people lovingly called the "great bread basket of America."

But even within this narrow frame of political and economic reference, an almost fatal fallacy existed.

Those interested and concerned with the farm problem most always considered it as a temporary and transitory problem. Bad weather would be followed by good weather and the problem would disappear. Or low farm prices would be followed by better prices -- or, at best, we took some band-aid measures to prop prices up.

And so it went for thirty-odd years. We fixed and patched and experimented and then patched some more.

Our intentions were good but our premise was wrong.

We failed to understand that the farm problem was really a national food problem. We failed to understand that the farm problem was not a transitory, year-to-year problem, but one that demanded long-term programs and long-term national responses.

And that's where we find ourselves today.

Farmers are dissatisfied with past farm policies and consumers are concerned with getting enough food and the price of it.

It has created a kind of national schizophrenia.

Farmers on the one hand criticize the consumers for wanting a "cheap food policy" -- yet, they know they can't get along without the consumers.

Consumers, on the other hand, want to buy food at the cheapest possible price but they also know that 220 million people are wholly dependent upon a handful of farmers for the one thing in life they need most -- food. Consumers, as taxpayers, resent paying taxes to subsidize farmers, yet their common sense now tells them they have a vested interest in keeping our farm families in business to produce that food.

As they say, it's a riddle wrapped in an enigma and presented as a dilemma.

The economically-depressed farmers want a quick-fix -- a new farm band-aid, as it were -- to get them out of the depressed situation.

Consumers and taxpayers are fearful that such a temporary quick-fix will greatly raise their food prices and add another tax burden. Furthermore, there is the real danger that the quick, temporary solution will become a permanent monstrosity -- and I'm not sure they are far wrong.

When this Administration took over some 15 months ago, we knew we had no alternative but to face the real world of farm politics and food economics.

We knew it would be an unpopular stance.

It would be unpopular, not because we weren't right or were unrealistic. It would be unpopular because neither farmers nor the public had broken the habit of tinkering with farm problems on an isolated, temporary basis.

We had to take the long view.

And we did.

We did it in a period when the bottom had fallen out of the market for wheat and feed grains. We did it at a time when the livestock industry was in its third successive year of destructive prices.

We did it at a time, when consumers still remembered the short wheat and grain supplies that had driven food prices to new record levels and consumers had been in near revolt.

Certainly, the situation required an answer. But the answer had to be a long-time treatment for a complete cure -- not just another anodyne to treat the syndrome.

Some sort of enduring stability had to be created in the farm sector. The disastrous boom-bust cycles in agriculture had to be evened out without destroying the market-oriented structure or diminishing the farmer's independence in decision-making.

Surplus inventories that severely depressed prices had to be controlled without endangering adequate food supplies in times of low production which are bound to come, or wrecking our farm export markets which are a vital key to our foreign balance of payments and our relationship to much of the world.

Consumers, at the same time, had to realize that they had to bear some of the responsibility to maintain a high level of food production and still permit farmers to stay in business.

Together with the Congress, we came up with the Food and Agriculture Act of 1977. It was a major step toward meeting the new realities of food politics and food economics.

Until we are proven wrong, we are convinced that this is the right direction to take.

We have -- as you know -- resisted all the pressures to change our long-time response to the farm and food problem for a costly, and perhaps, even disastrous overnight solution.

We are unwilling to sacrifice the livestock industry and the rest of agriculture in order to become instant heroes to another segment of producers.

We are unwilling to wreck our long-term farm export markets for immediate, short-range gains. It is ironic that the legislation some of the striking farmers demanded is also legislation that would endanger the one thing that wheat and feed grain farmers need the most -- expanded exports.

We are unwilling to saddle farmers with monstrous regulations and bureaucratic red tape.

We are unwilling to abandon necessary budget restraints to fire new inflationary fires and further burden the taxpayers.

And neither are we willing to write off a farm and food program that in a few short months is proving to be successful in strengthening farm prices on an enduring, solid basis.

It is a program that this year will net the third highest farm income in history -- at least \$4 billion more in net income over one year ago.

It is a program that is isolating the heavy drag of surpluses in a national grain reserve where it will be like money in the bank to farmers and a source of needed food for the nation and a hungry world.

It is a program that will permit us to continue expanding our farm exports that help farmers, pay for much of our imported crude oil, and keep us as the world's most dependable supplier of food for much of the world.

It is a program that will maintain food production and protect the consumer from run-away food prices. In brief, it is an acceptable and wholly workable program.

And I think farmers, business and consumers will soon realize this.

One of the interesting things about dealing with the world of farm and food economics is that you begin to deal with about every major problem facing this nation today.

You name it. We are confronted with the problems of the energy crisis which is one of the major sources of our inflation.

Inflation itself bedevils both farmers and business and consumers alike.

You deal with the problems of international trade on a major scale when you talk about food. This in turn makes you face the grim realities of our deficit balance of payments and devaluation of the dollar which affects all of us.

In food economics you deal with regulations and controls. Do you use controls in agriculture or do you avoid them? And at what price?

This is not too much different than the challenge President Carter posed to the nation recently in his anti-inflation message.

The issue boils down to one thing: are the American people, business and government willing to make some sacrifice and exercise voluntary restraints to meet the rip-off of continued inflation or do they prefer the only other alternative: explicit wage and price controls?

So you see, the dilemma we have experienced in agriculture and the food system is very similar to the dilemma we face on all other major issues.

And that, my friends, is what this whole social and economic revolution is all about. We must deal with the real world of today -- just as it is -- not with the tools and attitudes of yesterday.

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